
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
Historic Landmark Designation Cases No. 11-10

1349 Kenyon Street, NW (Square 2843 Lots 8, 808)

Meeting Date:	March 22, 2012
Applicant:	Urban Investment Partners
Owner:	Urban Investment Partners
Affected ANC:	ANC 1A
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Williams

After careful consideration, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board not designate the apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street, NW in Columbia Heights as a D.C. Historic Landmark. However, in recognition of the historic character of the building and the owner's desire to follow through on commitments made to the affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A, the staff recommends that the Board officially declare the building a contributing resource within Columbia Heights, a potential historic district that the Board formally recognized as eligible for historic district designation in 2001.



Historical and Architectural Background

The building at 1349 Kenyon Street, NW in Columbia Heights is a four-story (plus basement) buff brick apartment building designed by architect Robert O. Scholz and built by developer Harry M. Bralove in 1924. The building, designed in a Classical Revival style with

Mediterranean Revival-style features, has an I-shaped form with twin projecting full-height bays that frame the façade. The central entry, recessed from these projecting bays, is set within a smooth and broad limestone surround with incised ornamentation above the entry door. The building features a regular arrangement of single, double-hung windows across the façade, except in the end bays where a tri-partite grouping of windows enclose what were originally open and integrated porches on each of the four floors of the projecting wings.

The apartment building was constructed in Columbia Heights in 1924, one block off of Fourteenth Street, during a period of explosive growth in residential construction city-wide, particularly that of apartment buildings. During the World War I era, as the city's population expanded along with the growth of the federal government, an acute housing shortage developed in the city. While building was stalled during the war, the post-World War I years saw an enormous increase in residential development, particularly to accommodate the influx of new residents with fixed federal salaries. Developers seized on the investment potential of apartment building construction as the city's new middle-class came to accept apartment living as an alternative to the more expensive single-family home.

Although apartment buildings were built as early as the 1890s in the 19th-century residential subdivision of Columbia Heights, they were not constructed in earnest until the years just prior to America's entry into World War I and in the decades that followed. By then, vacant lots in Columbia Heights were scattered in groups of five or six, making apartment building development a better investment for developers than the traditional row house building pattern of the previous decades. Given its proximity to the city and its convenience along the streetcar line, Columbia Heights proved to be a prime market for such development.

The apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street was constructed in the midst of this boom when 41 apartment buildings were constructed in Columbia Heights during the 1920s alone. The building was designed by Robert O. Scholz, a local architect noted in particular for his designs of apartment buildings throughout the city, and built by developer Henry M. Bralove, a prominent local builder also well known in the apartment building industry. On Kenyon Street, Scholz and Bralove built what has been categorized in the Multiple Property Document on apartment buildings as a "Conventional Low-Rise Apartment Building." Scholz designed the building in a Classical Revival style with Mediterranean-style influences such as the overhanging red tile roof and integrated porches. The I-shaped building form and the integrated porch design provided the interior apartment units with multiple exposure and increased light and air not found in older apartment building prototypes.

A major selling point of the apartments at 1349 Kenyon Street was its location along 14th Street that offered the dual advantage of accessibility via the streetcar to downtown and the quiet of a residential neighborhood. Advertisements touted the building's "uptown location" and the quiet of the neighborhood that made the building "a most ideal place to live."

Evaluation

The apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street has been evaluated under the Multiple Property Document, *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C. 1880-1945* and under D.C. Designation Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register Criterion A (History) and

Criterion C (Architecture). As noted in the nomination, the apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street illustrates the growing acceptance of apartment living during the early to mid-20th century, and the ensuing prevalence of apartment building construction city-wide. In addition, the building's location in Columbia Heights, near the Fourteenth Street streetcar line, illustrates the continuing evolution of residential development of the neighborhood from row house to apartment building construction that catered to the city's middle-class resident.

The apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street provides an example of a speculative middle-class apartment building type that was constructed in the first quarter of the 20th century to accommodate the city's housing needs. The building perfectly meets the definition of the "Conventional Low Rise Apartment Building Sub-Type" as described in the Multiple Property Document, *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945*: the building is between two and four stories, it has a single main public entry, does not contain an elevator, and it has at least five self-sufficient dwelling units.

The Conventional Low Rise Apartment Building is a common building type found throughout the District, and is well represented in the Columbia Heights neighborhood, including five other examples of the subtype on the 1300 block of Kenyon Street alone. While it is true that the apartment at 1349 Kenyon Street is representative of its building sub-type, the application for designation does not make a compelling case that it is a particularly *good representation* of the building type. In fact, due in part to alterations, the building is *not* a particularly good representation of its sub-type. For instance, the building was originally equipped with integrated porches that contributed to the quality of light and air in the individual apartments. Innovations in apartment building design during this period focused on providing such improvements to apartment building living. The elimination of the porches thus detracts from a salient design feature of the building that would qualify it as a good example of its apartment building sub-type. Although the nomination notes that the enclosed porches are reversible (the windows can be removed), the design, feeling, and association conveyed by the existing condition of the enclosed porches is compromised.

Similarly, the application notes that the building is an "excellent representation of the Classical Revival style intertwined with the Italian Renaissance style adapted for multi-family use." However, the building does not necessarily stand as a good representation of its style since the most significant feature marking the building as Italian Renaissance (the open porches reminiscent of "loggias") is not intact.

While staff does not believe that the apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street meets the criteria for designation as a DC Landmark, staff recognizes that the building does contribute to the history, architectural history and urban planning history of Columbia Heights and contributes to the historic character of the streetscape. Staff thus recommends that the Board officially determine the apartment building at 1349 Kenyon Street a contributing resource within a potential Columbia Heights Historic District.